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March 14, 1980

BISHOP ALLIN PROTESTS ACTION AGAINST BISHOP TUTU

NEW YORK -- The Rt. Rev. John M. Allin, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, has cabled the Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa that it was with "great sorrow, regret and indignation " that he learned that Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu was forced to surrender his passport by officials of that government.

The action against Bishop Tutu -- who is general secretary of the South Africa Council of Churches and former Bishop of Lesotho -- was taken shortly after he had expressed outrage at a 69-month prison sentence imposed on the Rev. David Russell for violating the terms of his banning order.

Bishop Allin told Prime Minister P.W. Botha of South Africa, "This action appears to be at variance with your expressed desire for peace and reconciliation among all in your land. The people of the Episcopal Church join me in requesting your government to reconsider this move against one whom we know as a colleague and friend, and to cease such actions in the future against other courageous Christian leaders who are committed to justice and dignity for all."

Father Russell, whose sentence Bishop Tutu called "vicious...even within South Africa," was sentenced for attending the December meeting of the Anglican Provincial Synod to which he had been elected. A banned person is not permitted to leave his district, speak, write or be part of any assembly. Fifty-seven months of the sentence were suspended and he is currently at liberty -- although remaining under the ban -- while the rest is appealed. Father Russell was banned because of his defiance of South Africa's apartheid laws.

Bishop Tutu said of the government's action in lifting his passport, "This is intended to stop us from speaking the truth, but I owe my allegiance to Jesus Christ. I will speak as I believe he commands. I will speak for justice and reconciliation."

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Bishop Allin also protested the South African action in telegrams to U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, and South Africa's Ambassador to the United Nations.

The Presiding Bishop asked President Carter and Secretary Vance "to protest this act of injustice with the same degree of resolve that (the government) has shown in the past in speaking out against infringements of human rights in other parts of the world."

Bishop Allin said to South Africa's Ambassador to the United Nations that his government's action "deserves an explanation to those throughout the world who are committed to basic human rights."

The Presiding Bishop informed Archbishop Bill Burnett of the Church of the Province of South Africa of his actions.

In a personal cable to Bishop Tutu, Bishop Allin said, "We have joined our voice of protest with countless others throughout this nation. May God continue to grant you courage and determination to speak the truth boldly in the face of injustice, deprivation of human rights, and acts of dehumanization.

"Our prayers, concern and love are with you."

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(NOTE: For the DP and DX mailing lists, this is an updating of DPS release #80082, dated March 13.)

